

COLUSA COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMISSION

Minutes of Public Meeting

March 21, 2000

The meeting of the Colusa County Children and Families Commission was called to order at 1:35 p.m. in the Morse Conference Room at the Colusa Library, 738 Market Street, Colusa, California.

Commissioners Dolores Gomez, Barbara Hankins, Nancy Parriott, and Christy Scofield were present, constituting a quorum.

Items discussed and actions taken in accordance with the publicly-posted agenda were as follows:

1. Approval of Minutes: March 1, 2000 Meeting

Commissioner Parriot moved to approve the minutes without correction; motion seconded by Commissioner Gomez. The motion was passed unanimously by voice vote (4/0). It was also noted that minutes will be sent to a representative from the newspaper for all meetings; it is very important to keep the media and the public informed about the activities of the Commission.

2. Review Outstanding Invoices and Approve Payment of Expenses

No new expenses were submitted for consideration. Checks for payment of previously submitted expenses have been processed by the County and should be ready to be sent this week.

3. Progress Report on the Assessment of Community Needs and Resources

Four major activities have comprised the effort to perform a comprehensive assessment of community needs and resources related to early childhood development: (1) compilation and assimilation of an extensive amount of pre-existing information consisting of previous surveys, studies, and reports on topics related to young children and their families; (2) public town meetings to talk directly with parents about needs and concerns; (3) a survey of parents on needs, barriers to accessing services, and desired future services; and (4) a survey of educators, social service providers and other professionals to obtain their perspective on the gaps and strengths of our current system of services.

Status of these four major activities:

- The compilation and assessment of pre-existing information is almost complete. Mike Smith is working on filling in a few information gaps related to existing services and their capacity or current levels of service being provided.
- Four public town meetings have been completed. One more meeting is planned for Grimes, which will be scheduled and conducted as soon as possible by Commissioners Scofield and Gomez.
- No more parent surveys have been received. The raw data from these surveys has been compiled; the remaining step is to finish analyzing the results and incorporate this information into the assessment report.
- The provider survey was sent last week to 261 people. 32 responses have been returned to date and more are coming in; it is projected that we will have 50-60 responses by the end of this week. Mike Smith will be compiling the results and incorporating them into the assessment report.

The consensus of the Commission was that after completing the remaining tasks described above, sufficient information is available to understand the needs in the community and to make good choices about goals, objectives and strategies that will meet those needs while leveraging the strengths of the community. It is time to move into the next phase, which is developing the components of the strategic plan. The assessment report will be completed and sent to the Commissioners by March 30th at the latest.

4. Plan and Schedule Public Input on Results of the Community Needs and Resource Assessment

Discussion occurred on whether to hold a separate public input process on the results of the community needs assessment or wait until the strategic plan was developed so that public input could be obtained on both the needs and the proposed solutions. It was decided that the public input process will be more meaningful when the strategic plan has been drafted, so no separate public input process will be held at this time. However, the Commission does want to encourage public involvement at all times and will continue to publicize meetings and take other steps to promote public involvement. Also, the upcoming town meeting in Grimes will be publicized broadly in the county so that people who were unable to attend the meeting in their own town will have another opportunity to participate.

5. Establishment of Office and Other Points of Contact for the Public

Options for setting up an office were discussed. Career Resources has offered use of their receptionist and an address to receive mail, but space is not available for a desk. Children's Services and other county offices are tight on space. The current contact address and phone number is the same as the Board of Supervisors, with calls and materials being routed to Commissioner Scofield. After discussion, it was decided to wait until it was time to hire a staff person before setting up an office or changing the contact address and phone number. Bonnie Marshall indicated that a desk may be available in the Department of Human Services building as a temporary workspace for SEI consultants for the next couple of months.

6. Approach to Developing Strategic Goals and Objectives

The first topic discussed was the scope of the strategic plan being developed. Specifically, should the strategic plan be a "Proposition 10" plan that focuses on the utilization of Proposition 10 funds or should it be a comprehensive countywide plan for early childhood development? Points raised during the discussion included:

- There is a great deal of fragmentation right now. The schools, Department of Human Services, Department of Behavioral Health, and so on are working independently for the most part and are often not fully aware of each other's actions, programs and resources. A concern is that Proposition 10 efforts may become yet another disconnected set of activities.
- The Inter-agency Council has received approval on a \$170,000 grant to fund a Coordinator position for 2½ years, precisely to help coordinate efforts and reduce fragmentation.
- It is also necessary for agencies to work closely together from a funding perspective. Funding is limited in the county, and many sources of funds have restrictions attached to them. Truly meeting the needs of families requires putting together bits and pieces of funding from many sources in order to create a comprehensive service.
- In the town meetings, parents clearly stated their desire for an inclusive, seamless system of services. Services should not be limited to low-income families. Coordination of programs and funding is necessary to make this happen.

These issues suggest that a more inclusive strategic planning process – a comprehensive countywide plan for early childhood development – is necessary. Possible approaches to creating a more comprehensive strategic plan were discussed, such as setting up an Advisory Council comprised of representatives from each of the service providers working with young children and parent groups to work on developing specific objectives, strategies and desired outcomes. The Inter-agency Council may be a good starting point for creating this Advisory Council. It will be important to recruit people who are willing to put the time into the planning process and who can represent their agency or perspective while working well in a team to look for creative, collaborative solutions. If an Advisory Council were created, the Commission should provide them with a starting point by proposing goals and objectives that reflect what was learned from the community assessment process. It was noted that the objectives should be concrete and unambiguous; it is important to conclusively prove that Proposition 10 resources have made a difference in the community.

Time is needed for the Commissioners to think more about the scope of planning and the best approach to take. Discussion on this topic will continue at the next meeting, focused on two key topics: (1) a decision on the scope of the planning process and corresponding approach to expand the participation in the process, and (2) start to define the strategic goals and objectives.

7. Report on State Commission Meeting and Recent Conference Calls

Mike Smith distributed a report summarizing the events from the March 16th State Commission meeting and walked through the highlights of the report. Two conference calls sponsored by the State Commission have also been held so far in March, one reviewing the statewide projects approved for funding by the State Commission earlier this year and the other discussing the plans for the Welcome Baby Kit that is being developed. Another conference call will be held on March 24th on fiscal strategies for County Commissions.

Input was sought from the Commission on two state-level issues. First, the State Commission is setting up a process for review of county strategic plans and will be soliciting input from the counties as to what that process should look like. The input from Colusa County is: (1) trust the county's knowledge of their own issues and don't try to be prescriptive, telling counties they should be doing things differently; (2) either offer early review before the strategic plan is adopted or approach the review process as technical assistance on improving the plan (not an "audit" or "evaluation" of the plan); and (3) be sensitive to the fact that smaller counties are different and may need a different type of support, particularly since the funding constraints are severe for small counties.

The second issue is whether Colusa County wants to participate in a statewide association of County Commissions that is in the early discussion / formation stage. The guidance from the Commission on this topic was that Colusa County is interested but concerned about how the association would be funded. Any monetary contributions from the counties should be based on a percentage of total Proposition 10 funding or a sliding scale based on county funding levels, and not a fixed dollar amount where every county pays the same. Also, the County Supervisors Association of California (CSAC) had previously offered to sponsor this type of statewide association. Investigate CSAC and other such organizations to see if someone already has the funding and infrastructure to sponsor the association before creating a whole new organization.

8. Public Comment and Unscheduled Matters

- State legislation has been proposed (Assembly Bill 1910) clarifying the legal status of County Commissions. Public hearings on the bill should occur in April. Input from each county has been sought regarding the desired legal status; Commissioner Scofield will respond to the request for information.
- Mike Smith has checked into the ability to set up a web site for Colusa County through the State Commission's web site. The state office indicated they should have the technical ability to sponsor web sites after April 1st, so follow up will occur in April. Also, options to get posters or other large display materials for the Family Fair have been explored with the state public relations staff. No such materials currently exist but state staff is investigating options and costs to produce these kinds of materials.
- Discussions with other County Commissions have noted discrepancies in how counties are receiving money from the state Children and Families Trust Fund. Checks should be coming to the counties at a rate of roughly one a month now, and sometimes they are sent to the wrong people at the county. Only two checks have been received by Colusa County so far, one for the planning grant and one for local trust fund deposit. Follow up is needed to reconcile the local trust fund balance and ensure that we have received all of the funds we should have. Commissioner Scofield will find out the current balance of the local trust fund and forward a copy of all available paperwork on checks from the state to Mike Smith, who will contact the State Commission to verify that trust fund balance reflects all money that has been issued (and should have been issued) by the state.

9. Dates for Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 6, from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. at the Morse Conference Room at the Colusa Library.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Mike Smith, consultant to the Commission.